



SHARPSVILLE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Most, though not all, of you reading this newsletter are already members of the Sharpsville Area Historical Society. We genuinely appreciate the support we receive from our members and the wider community, whether financial support, volunteering for our events and projects, or donations of documents and artifacts.

During a recent collaborative meeting with other historical societies in the county, we learned that others—in particular, Greenville, Grove City, and Mercer County's—have a much higher membership count, as well as more involvement from their members. Moreover, during a recent visit to the Mercer County Historical Society (to scan some microfilms of *The Sharpsville Advertiser*), the place seemed to be a beehive of activity, with six volunteers working on various archival projects in addition to their paid administrator who was fielding calls and visits.

This has prompted discussion among our Board of how we can better attract members and actively involve them. While we may have a smaller population base than some of the other areas, we agreed that we can do better.

Prior emphasis has been on the accomplishments of the Society—ranging from help coordinating both the Borough's 125th and 150th Anniversary celebrations, to the purchase and restoration of our historic headquarters, to the many cultural and community-building events we have brought to town, our walking tours, and to the publication of historical DVDs, brochures, and our book. But, some may want to know, how can this involve me? (More or less, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”)

Maybe helping to archive our records, or going through them to help research the history of our town interests you. Perhaps you and a group of friends want to get together and help with a cleaning party at our headquarters or help weeding or pruning our grounds. Maybe you're the active type who wouldn't shy from spearheading a fundraising project. Or, if you have some handyman skills, these are always welcome at our 145-year old building. (And, if you're none of these, maybe you have a friend that is.) Or, maybe you want to get involved but first want to check out what the Society is up to at our next board meeting (fourth Monday of the month at 7:00). Regardless of your interests, you'll be welcome here.

Upcoming Events

GAMBLING SPREE BUS TRIPS

JACK Thistledown Casino, N. Randall, OH
May 21st

Live! Casino, Greensburg, PA
June 18th

Call 724-813-9199 for details



"I Love Lucy"

Bus Trip
July 24th

Join us with a guided tour of the Lucy & Desi Museum, the National Comedy Center, and the LucyTown Tour in Lucille Ball's hometown of Jamestown, NY. Includes a buffet lunch at a recreation of Ricky Ricardo's Tropicana Club.

Call 724-813-9199 for info and reservations

Open House

As a reminder the Historical Society is open the first and third Saturday of the month from 1:00p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Come see the unique architecture—both interior and exterior—of our historic building as well as a large display of our artifacts, documents, and photos of Sharpsville history.

Our basement display has expanded and may include items you may have missed on a prior visit.

A Look Back

Harry “Lighthouse” Wilson

Sharpsville has had no shortage of sports heroes, though each generation will argue theirs was the greatest. It may be hard to dispute, however, that Harry E. Wilson was the greatest of them all. The question, though, is whether Sharpsville or Sharon should claim him as their own—though he seems to have been neglected by us as well as our cross-town rivals.

Harry Edgar Wilson was born in 1902 in Mingo Junction, Ohio (on the Ohio River, a little downstream of Weirton and Steubenville). By 1910, his family was located in Beaver County, Pa., before coming to Sharpsville. He gained prominence in college football in the 1920s, first at Penn State and then at West Point. Football then meant college football, with pro football still in its infancy and far overshadowed by the college game in popularity and prestige. This was also the decade of the great running backs—Red Grange, Ernie Nevers, Dutch Clark, Albie Booth, Notre Dame’s “four horsemen” backfield, among others.

Wilson started his collegiate career at Penn State. After a year of Freshman ball, he got some playing time as a sophomore. The 1922 season, as left halfback saw him as the main engine of the Nittany Lions’ offense. In his final season, Harry earned national notice, beginning with a stellar performance against a powerful Navy squad: an interception returned for touchdown of 50 yards, a 95-yard kickoff return for score, and a 73-yard TD run from scrimmage. He was the main star in a tie against West Virginia, and in a shut-out of Penn, Harry accounted for all the scoring with a 25-yard touchdown catch and TD runs of 45 and 49 yards. While only selected by Walter Camp as a second-team All-American, he was subsequently honored as the “most outstanding player of the season” by a conference of fifty of the country’s leading football coaches.

With his years at Penn State concluded, he enrolled in the U.S. Military Academy in 1924. This is where he also gained the nickname of “Lighthouse,” in reference to the Revolutionary War patriot soldier, Harry “Light-Horse” Lee. It seems unusual, but Harry ended up playing seven years of varsity between the two schools. Nonetheless, before Wilson had come to the Academy—going back to 1901 when the Harvard captain enrolled in West Point after graduation—at least nine college stars had transferred in for another four years of eligibility. By Harry’s senior year, the entire Army backfield was composed of transfers. When the NCAA was founded in 1906, they promulgated eligibility rules that limited collegiate play to one freshman and three varsity seasons; moreover, those who transferred between schools were required to sit out one year. While the Academy was a charter member of the NCAA, they apparently felt its special circumstances allowed them certain exemptions. It is, of course, understandable that any transfer to the Academy had to start as a first-year plebe, in order to have the four years of military training and discipline not available at other institutions. Somehow, this was conflated to allow them to recruit players from other schools with the prospect of a full four years on the varsity team. While this practice was tolerated, recruitment became more aggressive during the 1920s—irking

the Naval Academy so much so that they cancelled the 1928 and ’29 Army-Navy game over West Point’s unique interpretation of eligibility rules. (Some of this assertiveness is evidenced when Harry was offered an appointment to the Academy in the Penn State locker room following their game against Pitt.)

Harry played a major part in Army’s 1924 season, as a plebe on a team stacked with upperclassmen; it included a forty-yard run against Florida. As with his career at Penn State, the big play seemed to be Harry’s specialty at West Point—not only as a halfback—but on the other side of the ball as well. Adding to the three interceptions returned for touchdown at Penn State, at Army he had an 85-yard pick-six. To his long TD runs from scrimmage of 16-, 25-, 30-, and three of 35 yards, his scoring included a 70-yard punt return, and a 10-yard pass, which he then took 60 yards into the endzone.

The 1926 season ended with Wilson the second highest scorer in Eastern football (back when intersectional play was rare and the midwestern and Pacific coast teams were still considered upstarts)—12 touchdowns and 23 dropkicks for the points after.



A Look Back

Jimmy Blose

It goes without saying that all military veterans merit our nation's respect. And, those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country deserve our enduring gratitude. Nonetheless, those who fought in World War II appear to have a special esteem—whether because of the enormity of the mobilization or the stark moral stakes the conflict entailed. In all, fifteen servicemen died in the service of their country during the War. Included in the list is James “Jimmy” W. Blose, though for decades he was listed as “Missing in Action” rather than “Died in Service.” The following reprint of Joe Zentis’ 2007 article, “Lost pilot finally found,” from The Herald describes what was found to be Lieutenant Blose’s fate, as well as the lengths the United States military goes to bring their soldiers home.

The remains of 1st Lt. James Blose, a 1936 graduate of Sharpsville High School will be laid to rest Saturday in Hillcrest Memorial Park, more than 65 years after his plane crashed in Fiji during World War II. He will be buried near the graves of his parents, longtime Sharpsville residents Edison Clyde Blose and Twila Loretta (Robinson) Blose.

The fighter pilot had been missing since his plane failed to return from a mission on April 22, 1942.

Born on Aug. 30, 1918, Jimmy Blose was driven by a restless spirit. He wrote later, “I may have been a much better man had I stayed in Sharpsville, but I know that I never could have been content living there. Something was missing there; I don’t know just what it was.”

Even in high school, he passionately wanted to fly. He left Sharpsville in 1938 to study aeronautical engineering at the University of Michigan. While there, he took lessons to get his civilian pilot’s license.

He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in February 1941. Through most of that year, he trained at airfields in Oklahoma and Texas. His niece, Susan Blose Crowley of Hermitage has the letters he wrote home from there.

“By reading those letters,” she said, “I feel like I know him, even though he died before I was born.”

On Feb. 13, the day he arrived at his base in Muskogee, Okla., he wrote that the cadets got off to a quick start: “Got out to the field about 9:00 and have been on the go ever since. Drill, supplies, exams, orders and everything else . . . I don’t know what to do with all the clothes that I brought. We are given all that we need here and can’t leave the field except Sat. night.”

After three weeks there, he wrote about the stress of the training. “Our planes cost over \$14,000 apiece and they don’t want them cracked up. It costs the government over \$100 a day to train us. That is why they are so strict and wash out so many. About three upper-classmen leave every day. They want only those who can fly and fly well.” He was doing quite well: “I was seventh to solo in a class of 120. Not bad, was it?”

Blose was a sensitive young man: “I noticed buds coming out on some trees yesterday and the farmers were plowing,” he wrote. But he learned that gazing at the scenery could be hazardous. “One fellow waved at us when we were practicing forced landings. Both the instructor and I waved to him at the same time and the plane almost got out of control. I got the devil for it afterwards. We were only about 2-3 feet off the ground when he regained control and started to climb.”

The young aviator learned to deal creatively with unexpected situations. “I have done some acrobatic flying this past week,” he wrote on June 16. “I did a slow roll on Friday, got over on my back and couldn’t roll on over so I dove it out and picked up 210 mph in the dive. That is the fastest I have ever traveled and Dad complains about driving over sixty in the car.”

Six months later, he was flying a Bell Airacobra P-39D fighter that could attain more than 350 mph in level flight.



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Here are George and Eva Achenbach, at their store, Achenbach's Nonpareil Bakery. The photo, from 1914, was apparently taken before they filled their cases with the day's fresh baked goods. The store stood at the corner of Main & Sixth, and was previously occupied by the P.H. Smith Bakery. (The space is now occupied by Dom Bucciarelli's barber shop, until recently Augie DelFratte's shop.) The store was later a general grocery store run by George and Eva as late as 1940, about when it was taken over by their son, Karl.

Contact Us

website: www.sharpsvillehistorical.org
 email: sharpsvillehistorical@hotmail.com

see our website for officers' phone numbers

Headquarters: 131 N. Mercer Ave., Sharpsville, Pa.

Mailing address: 955 Forest Lane, Sharpsville, Pa. 16150

Meetings are held the Fourth Monday of the Month at 7:00pm at our headquarters

With Gratitude

We received a generous donation to support our building improvements from
Ralph W. & Carol R. Mehler

BUY-A-BRICK

Please consider an "In Memory of" or "In Honor of" brick for a loved one.

4" x 8" bricks with three lines of inscription—\$75

8" x 8" bricks with six lines of inscription—\$125

The bricks will be placed in the town park.

In Memoriam

Cindy Alexander was an active, devoted member of the Sharpsville Historical Society for twelve years and a valued board member for three years. She gave much time and energy to preserving Sharpsville's history, was particularly involved in arranging entertainment for our annual Ice Cream Socials, and was valued for her insightful advice.

Her recent passing is deeply mourned.

Jimmy Blose, cont'd.

He was confident that flying was safe. "Our commanding officer said that while we are in training, more cadets would be killed in automobile accidents than in plane accidents. Since I have been in Texas, three cadets have been killed in automobile accidents and only two in a plane. So you see, flying isn't dangerous. It is true that a plane will fly itself but a car won't drive itself."

On Sept. 8, Blose revealed another development in his life. "I have been dating a girl by the name of Catherine Zahn. I met her parents last night and her mother is very nice.

Three months later, after receiving his wings, he wrote: "The original pair that the Gov't. gives us are as much as an engagement ring or a fraternity pin. Catherine has mine."

Blose was aware of his responsibilities as a member of the armed forces.

"Think of everybody in the U.S. We are doing a big job for them. I like to think that I am making Catherine's (and many more like her) future happiness a little more secure, maybe not with me but at least with someone. You should feel proud that I have been asked to carry much more responsibility than the average young man. I don't know what we are going to get into over there, but I want to go."

He was also proud of his accomplishments.

"Yes, I certainly have traveled in the last year and ten years experience have been crowded into one. The past year has been a big one for me and I wouldn't trade it for anything. If you stop to think of it, my progress has been amazing. I am in a position to demand respect anywhere in the world, and that is a lot."

Blose was assigned to the newly formed 70th Pursuit Squadron. On Dec. 5, they boarded ships to sail to the Philippines. On Dec. 7, they were ordered back to California because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. They were deployed to the Fiji Islands on Jan. 12, 1942.

On April 22, Blose and another pilot, Lt. William Shaw, were scrambled from Nausori Airdrome on Viti Levu, Fiji's largest island, to intercept reported Japanese fighters. But bad weather closed in, and they were instructed to land at Landi Airdrome, 85 miles west of Nausori. The two fighters lost contact with one another; Shaw landed safely, but Blose never arrived.

Shaw said that the two aircraft had flown down through a small valley several miles inland and were forced to make sharp turns and climb steeply to try to clear the mountains.

During the next week, searches by air and on the ground proved futile. Searchers said the vegetation was so thick that they couldn't have seen the aircraft even if they had been within 25 yards of it.

Blose was declared missing in action. Further investigation during and after the war failed to turn up any further information. The Blose family was left with nothing but a faint hope.

Occasionally tiny sparks would appear to set that hope aflame. Shortly after Blose was declared missing, they received a letter from Babe Cominole, one of his good friends.

"I'm sorry to hear about the telegram from Washington concerning Jim, but frankly I wouldn't let it worry me too much if I were you. Apparently military sources themselves are not positive about his status. It may be quite a while before they can find out just where he is. I almost know he is okay and still flying somewhere or another."

In 1947, a letter from a contractor in Fiji might have rekindled the smoldering hope. "Local people of European & mixed origin have entered the brush," he wrote, "lost their direction and have survived for years before finding a highway or a native village. Invariably, they suffered from loneliness only, as there are no serious tropical diseases here, no poisonous animals, and food is plentiful. There is only a hope, and unfortunately a slight one, that your son will someday walk out of the bush unharmed and well. There is another slight chance that someday his plane will be found."

His second prediction turned out to be the correct one.

In 2004, a couple of Fijian pig hunters reported that they had found fragments of a plane that looked like it dated from World War II. During a preliminary search of the site, Col. Patrick Reardon from the U.S. Embassy found the data plate from the plane, as well as the name of Lt. Blose near the cockpit.

As was traditional with World War II flyers, the tail of the plane was personalized. On it was the name "Kitty," with a painting of a cat.

There were also remains of the pilot. Reardon secured the site for later investigation.

Last year, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command excavated the site.

Jimmy Blose, cont'd.

They discovered personal effects, including a Sharpsville class ring.

All evidence pointed to Blose but investigators would not release the name until they were 100 percent certain.

On Aug. 30, 2006, Blose's birthday, genealogist Theresa Fisher contacted Mrs. Crowley who is the daughter of Blose's only brother Paul.

Fisher was searching for one of Blose's first cousins to obtain a DNA sample. Crowley put them in contact with Sarah Marshall. The DNA confirmed that the pilot was indeed Lt. James Blose.

Last month, Department of the Army Mortuary Officer Jimmy Johnson called Mrs. Crowley to begin arrangements for Blose's funeral.

On Aug. 22, he brought her the full report of the army's investigation. She was very pleased with the thoroughness of the report and with the army's handling of the whole affair.

Blose will be honored Saturday with calling hours starting at 10 a.m. in John Flynn Funeral Home on East State Street in Hermitage.

A memorial service at 11 a.m. will be followed by a military funeral in Hillcrest Memorial Park.

Everyone is invited to come and join in honoring Lt. Blose.

The author, Joe Zentis, collected this, and other stories like it, and published them in book form—Lives of Quiet Inspiration—ultimately printing three volumes.

Items for Sale

Traces of Old Sharpsville

A thoroughly researched history of Sharpsville with short, readable articles grouped into themed chapters and many photos — \$40

Santa Collection

Featuring images of Sharpsville's beloved Santa visits

Mugs — \$15

Ornaments — \$15

T-Shirts — \$20

Bookmarks

Engraved with the 150th Anniversary Logo — \$5

Charcuterie Boards

Engraved with images of Pierce Mansion, First Universalist Church, Jonas Pierce House, or the Santa Visits Every Home Sign — \$40 each

Available online at sharpvillehistorical.org, or for local pick-up call 724-877-9958

Harry “Lighthouse” Wilson, cont’d.

At the conclusion of Harry’s Junior year, he was elected captain of next-year’s football team. (On the same page as one newspaper’s notice of the election is an article reminding one of long-forgotten football powers. In it, Knute Rockne was interviewed about Notre Dame’s loss to Carnegie Tech—now Carnegie Mellon.)

In a recap of his final season with Army, Wilson doesn’t figure as prominently in the scoring as in the past, though the team did well, losing only to Yale. In the final contest—the only one that matters—against Navy, however, Harry was the star of the game. As the Academy’s yearbook put it: “It was an inspired team for behind that team was an indomitable Harry Wilson. It was through his sterling efforts that we can truly claim this victory. Navy could not stop him, with tacklers clinging to his heels he would twist and turn gaining those coveted yards. His first touchdown came at the start of the third quarter. In five consecutive plays he carried the ball from the forty yard line for a touchdown. . . . Greatest among the great, however, was the Army captain, Harry Wilson. For offense, defense and psychological effect he was outstanding.”

Harry was recognized as All-America—consensus All-America in 1923, third-team in 1924 and ’25, first-team in 1926. In 1973 he was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame. The father of American football and originator of All-America selections, Walter Camp, wrote in 1923, “Wilson on his good days has no peer.” For the ’26 and ’27 seasons he was teamed in the backfield with Chris Cagle. The duo is considered one of the greatest set of halfbacks in the history of the game. Some of Harry’s thrilling runs are recorded in the presentation for his induction into the Army Sports Hall of Fame online at <https://goarmywestpoint.com/honors/hall-of-fame/harry-wilson/79> plus at <https://www.instagram.com/executionhollow/reel/DDj7G99uR4r/>. He was not only a football star at Army, but earned a record twelve varsity letters in football, basketball, and lacrosse. Amazingly, he would also receive All-America accolades for basketball (first team in 1927), and lacrosse (first team in 1926 and second team in 1925 and ’27). (He gained entry to the College Lacrosse Hall of Fame ten years prior to his football induction.) Upon graduation, the Academy rewarded him with a sabre for his captaincy of the football team and as their outstanding athlete.

Now, was Harry Wilson from Sharpsville? Newspaper reports of his gridiron exploits cause confusion, with some referring to him as “of Sharpsville” and other “of Sharon.” Others get it right by noting his “home is in Sharpsville, Pa.” but that he “formerly attended Sharon, Pa. high school.”

Both local and official records confirm this. Tony Molinari’s book *Pads of Glory* has team photos of the 1917, ’18, and ’19 teams, with Harry in each of them, and with him listed as captain in his Senior year. (This is the definitive history of Sharon football, with an updated version, co-authored by Lyle Bieber and Brian Kepple, recently published and available for purchase from the Sharon Historical Society.) Moreover, 1921 is considered the year scholastic sports started in Sharpsville. Teams were certainly organized before then, but intermittently, not always with the sanction of the School Board, and often whether a team would be fielded dependent upon fundraising. So, it is not surprising that a Sharpsville gridiron talent would find more promising enrollment at neighboring Sharon which fielded a regular team. At the time, however, the 1920 census lists Harry and his family as living here at 60 Mercer Avenue. (His father, Bert Wilson, is listed as a manager at a foundry, presumably Valley Mould & Iron, so he likely had the wherewithal to pay the tuition for his son to attend Sharon. Or, perhaps, an exception was made to waive tuition for such a contributor to gridiron glory.) Yearbooks from both Penn State and West Point describe Harry as from Sharpsville. Military records pinpoint a more exact address, 58 Seventh Street, when he first enrolled at the U.S. Military Academy. In a 1923 interview with Sharpsville High’s school newspaper, George Mahaney, Sr., ardent sportsman and future burgess, summed it up best. “Speaking of football,” he said, “the first football played in Sharpsville was entirely kicking, the Rugby form. Football until lately has never been an organized sport. Wilson picked on some of the All-American squads, was a Sharpsville boy, and went to the Sharon schools to play football, and as a result Sharon claims him as their own. Be he received his first training with the boys of Sharpsville on the vacant lots of the town.”

After the Academy, the Harry made the military a career. During World War II, he commanded the 42nd bomber group in the South Pacific and flew 48 combat missions, earning a Distinguished Flying Cross and an Air Medal with six oak leaf clusters. He retired from the United States Air Force (successor to the Army Air Corps) as a colonel in 1956. His wife was a Sharon girl, Patricia Flinn; they married in 1932. While a military career required various moves, they appear to have settled in Rochester, N.Y., where Harry died in 1990 (though having recently moved to Florida). He is buried here at St. Mary’s Cemetery. Though a hero in wartime and on the gridiron, perhaps the finest measure of the man was written by his classmates at West Point: “Too often such great success and popularity as Harry’s begets a bit of egotism, but not with him; there is no more modest and unassuming man in the Corps than he. Always good-natured, he takes everything as it comes with a smile, and rarely indulges in our favorite indoor sport of griping. A man’s man from the ground to the top of his blond head, a personality that wins everyone as a friend, and a sense of humor that never fails.”